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FOR EUR/SCE AND EUR/NCE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/06/2017

TAGS: PGOV PREL YI LO

SUBJECT: AHTISAARI PLAN SPARKS DEBATE IN SLOVAKIA

REF: A. STATE 12957

¶B. VIKMANIS-KELLER - SILVERMAN EMAIL 2/7/07

Classified By: Ambassador Rodolphe M. Vallee for reason 1.4 b and d.

¶1. (C) Summary: UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari's plan on Kosovo final status has sparked heated debate in Slovakia. While the MFA forges ahead of the rest of the government and the general population toward "inevitable independence" for Kosovo, politicians and individual citizens continue to have deep reservations about splitting a Slavic nation apart, and also about the precedent that independence for Kosovar Albanians could set for other minorities in Europe, including Hungarians in Slovakia. Kubis has come under attack not only for his stance, but also for claiming that Serbian FM Draskovic said the constitutional referendum turnout was falsified. Nonetheless, we are beginning to see baby steps towards acceptance of Kosovo independence by some coalition politicians. Kubis has temporarily secured the various political parties' acquiescence in the MFA stance, but MFA contacts are waiting for a possible backlash, and whether PM Fico will weigh in upon his return from China. End summary.

MFA Official Stance

¶2. (U) The MFA released its official statement on the Ahtisaari plan February 2.

Begin Text

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic welcomed the presentation of the proposal for the Kosovo future status solution, which Special Envoy M. Ahtisaari delivered in Belgrade and Pristina on February 2, 2007. The proposal contains a lot of positive elements establishing the preconditions for the protection of minorities and strengthening the multiethnic and democratic society in Kosovo. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic also welcomed the intention of SE Ahtisaari to initiate consultations between both parties. These consultations will allow parties to adjust their positions closer to a negotiated solution and to modify them according to results of the upcoming consultations. The Slovak Republic intends to take a substantive position to the above-mentioned proposal after the consultation process is finished and the final proposal on the future status of Kosovo is presented to the UN Security Council.

End Text

¶3. (SBU) To further inform us, MFA Director for the Balkans and CIS Stefan Rozkopal 2/5 informally shared Slovakia's instructions to its Ambassador in Brussels for the PSC, as well as for FM Kubis's use during his lunch that day with EU

ambassadors.

Begin Text

-- Slovakia would like to reiterate its support for the efforts of UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari and the process of defining the future status of Kosovo, that is set to culminate with the adoption of a new UN Security Council resolution. There is no viable alternative to this process. Therefore we welcome the presentation of this draft comprehensive proposal to both parties last Friday.

-- Our first and foremost interest lies in a future solution that will enhance peace, stability, and prosperity in the Balkans. The outcome must not be a victory of one party and a humiliation of the other one. The process, that has now entered its final stage, should be handled with great care, firmly but not in a rigid way, with a necessary level of sensitivity towards legitimate interests of all parties involved.

-- The proposed package contains a lot of very positive elements and provisions such as generous protection of minorities, decentralization, protection and promotion of religious and cultural heritage and many others. All these elements shall in our view strengthen the foundations of a multiethnic and democratic society and the rule of law in Kosovo.

-- We welcome the intention of president Ahtisaari to initiate consultations between both parties, although limited in time, on certain aspects of the deal. We hope this will give Belgrade and Pristina a chance to move their positions closer towards a negotiated solution. We don't believe that any

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unfounded protraction of the process would improve its result. On the contrary, it could only create further difficulties. At the same time we think that Serbia should be given the necessary time and space in order to adopt a constitutionally relevant attitude towards the proposal.

-- Ahtisaari's package represents an open proposal that will be shaped in the following phase of the process. It is logical, therefore, that our definite stance on the package can only be defined at a stage, when the consultation process will have been completed and the final proposal will have been presented to the UN Security Council.

-- We are convinced that the EU unity on the issue of the status of Kosovo is crucial for a successful implementation of the status proposal, as well as for the stabilization of the region during the post-status period. We also feel that as much as the EU should be united in supporting the status process, it should also be united in promoting the European perspective of Serbia.

End Text

Kubis in Private

¶4. (C) Following our receipt of these "official" position papers, the Ambassador met 2/6 with FM Kubis to explain the U.S. position on the Ahtisaari plan (ref A). Kubis pushed back on the issue of timing. He said he understood that Tadic is appointing a parliamentary committee which will have the authority to represent Serbia in the dialogue on Ahtisaari's proposal. It will be about ten days until the committee is formed, i.e., mid-February. The committee must have time (about two months) to have a real debate on the proposal. This is vitally important (in that it provides political cover) for two reasons: (1) it will show the Russians that the proposal wasn't forced upon Serbia, and (2) it will show Slovakia's own electorate that there was give-and-take on the proposal. The latest date that new Serb government can be formed is May 24. If the new government

then falls because of Ahtisaari's proposal, then so be it, but the international community at that point should move ahead with the Ahtisaari plan, including a UNSCR.

¶ 15. (C) Kubis was optimistic about the Russians, as long as this Serbian parliamentary committee has time for real discussions. Kubis said that the implementation of Ahtisaari's plan must be within (not separate) UNSCR 1244. This is necessary to manage both the Russians and the reaction of the Serbs.

¶ 16. (C) The Ambassador asked if foreign ministers would adopt Ahtisaari's plan at the GAERC. Kubis admitted there were technical discussions over the wording. EU members cannot agree on "we WELCOME Ahtisaari's proposal." They want to convey two things: (1) Support for the process of engagement and forward movement towards the resolution of Kosovo and (2) (in a separate, non-Kosovo, message) Encouragement for Serbia, at this time of transition, to take its place in Europe. (Comment: Per ref B, we understand that the Slovaks are contributing to this problem in only wanting to welcome Ahtisaari's "presentation." We will raise this issue with PolDir Miroslav Lajcak 2/8, during our meeting presenting PDAS Volker's letter.)

Pro-Slav Sympathies and Fears of Hungarian Demands

¶ 17. (C) The MFA is formulating policy against the backdrop of an unsupportive population and political leadership. Both Prime Minister Fico and President Gasparovic have spoken out in favor of Serbia on this issue. Citing the Kosovo issue as indicative of a larger challenge, Rozkopal told poloffs that Foreign Minister Kubis has two full-time jobs. One is presenting Slovak foreign policy to the world, and the other is presenting Slovak foreign policy to Slovakia, often including the government itself. He described statements from coalition politicians such as Boris Zala, Smer MP and Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee in Parliament, as "my nightmare." (Note: Zala, echoing other nationalist voices, publicly said that Kosovo independence would result in calls for autonomy by other minorities in Europe, including Hungarians in Slovakia.) Rozkopal lamented that "every second Slovak citizen" has full confidence in Prime Minister Fico, and when Fico makes unhelpful statements, the MFA faces an uphill battle against the majority of the Slovak population. Rozkopal explained how he was "cornered in a sauna" by total strangers over the weekend when he expressed the inevitability of Kosovo independence.

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¶ 18. (C) An additional undercurrent influences Slovak sentiment on Kosovo, and that is fear of Muslims. On 2/7, members of parliament overwhelming voted in favor of a draft bill strengthening Slovakia's religious registration requirement, already the strictest in the OSCE (it must still go through two more readings to be passed into law). When asked why, politicians blatantly admit that they do not want Slovakia's small Muslim community to be able to register as an official religion. The desire to keep Europe a continent of Christian nations still has a strong influence on many Slovak politicians.

President Gasparovic wants More Talk, Trial Period

¶ 19. (C) One of the leading Slovak voices against Kosovo independence is, unfortunately, that of President Ivan Gasparovic. In a 2/6 meeting with Gasparovic, the Ambassador explained why Kosovo cannot be cited as a precedent for other European conflicts, particularly Hungarians in Slovakia. Gasparovic responded that the Albanian mafia had funded Kosovar Albanians. Gasparovic is seized of the issue, and has read the entire Ahtisaari proposal. He would like to see a trial period before full independence; he doesn't want this to be the final settlement. He feels the issue will lose the support of the Slovak people if the Serbs get collective

rights, which could set a precedent for Slovakia. Gasparovic intends to convene a meeting of leading Slovak ministers (Fico, Kubis, Kasicky) and opposition leaders to form a joint stance on Kosovo. (Comment: Gasparovic has an inflated opinion of his influence on foreign policy. It is not clear that he could actually pull off such a meeting or that it would have value. When the Ambassador asked when he would organize this meeting, Gasparovic said at a later date, because right now he is busy picking judges for the Constitutional Court. The Ambassador asked Kubis about Gasparovic's plan for a coalition-opposition meeting. Kubis thought such a meeting was a bad idea. Kubis was criticized by members of both the coalition and opposition over his 2/1 op-ed stating that Kosovo is on its way to independence. He is reluctant to let coalition and opposition members gang up on Ahtisaari's plan. End comment.)

Hungarians Take Offense

¶10. (SBU) Meanwhile, some opposition politicians are calling for just such a meeting...in order to dispel the rumor that Hungarians will demand autonomy if Kosovo becomes independent. Former Prime Minister Mikulas Dzurinda proposed discussions among all parties in parliament about Kosovo, and at a 2/5 press conference the Party of the Hungarian Coalition (SMK) vociferously supported the initiative. Former MFA State Secretary Jozsef Berenyi denied any links between the SMK/Hungarian minority in Slovakia and demands for separatism. He called claims by some coalition politicians that Kosovo independence would lead to Hungarian demands for autonomy "absurd." That same day, PoleCChief spoke to Zala about the unique circumstances of Kosovo.

Kubis Makes a Splash: Was Referendum Falsified?

¶11. (U) Kubis 2/6 appeared before the Slovak Parliamentary Committee for European Affairs to testify on Slovakia's positions heading into GAERC. (Note: Slovak law requires parliamentary approval of Slovak positions on EU matters.) In the debate on Kosovo, Kubis again expressed the inevitability of Kosovo independence, and said the process must move forward on the basis of Ahtisaari's plan, but that Slovakia would also seek to help Serbia integrate into EuroAtlantic structures. He also let slip that Serbian FM Draskovic told him last month that the real turnout in the constitutional referendum had been 42 percent, making the point that most Serbs were indifferent to the fate of Kosovo.

The press 2/7 widely criticized Kubis' lack of tact in revealing that information (if true). Draskovic firmly denied that he had ever made such a statement. Kubis then issued a statement saying he "never questioned the integrity of the Serbian referendum. Democratic Serbia has many times demonstrated ...the high quality and integrity of the election process, confirmed by independent monitors." In fact, MFA sources explained that Kubis was not trying to make news about Serbia; he was trying to signal to Slovaks that the GOS should not be "more Serbian than the Serbs," who had shown relatively weak interest in the referendum, given the issues at hand. Kubis was trying to gain more space to maneuver against the nationalists here.

Parties Starting to Come Around?

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¶12. (U) Quite aside from the controversy surrounding Kubis' statement is the fact that all eight members of the European Affairs committee voted to approve Kubis' message at GAERC, to welcome Ahtisaari's plan and proceed with negotiations toward eventual independence. Boris Zala voted in favor, and Smer spokesperson Lubica Koncalova said the party supported Ahtisaari's plan, despite Fico's pro-Serb sympathies. Most surprising of all, Slovak National Party (SNS) member Sergej Chelemendik approved Kubis' position. Nonetheless, SNS later distanced itself from Chelemendik's act. Spokesman Rafael Rafaj told the press, "I don't know why he voted that way;

I'm certainly going to ask him." Rafaj said SNS opposed independence for Kosovo from the standpoint of precedence, and also because it would harm a fellow Slavic nation. MFA contacts tell us they are waiting for partisan reaction to headlines proclaiming that all parties accept Kosovo independence. More importantly, they are waiting to see if PM Fico actively engages upon his return from China.

Comment:

¶13. (C) In addition to our efforts with the MFA 2/8, we are continuing to engage politicians in all parties, reinforcing Kubis' efforts to move Slovakia toward accepting Kosovo's final status. Though it may seem like baby steps forward in changing Slovak public opinion, there may be growing resignation among many politicians to accept, in Kubis' words, "the inevitable." But we cannot rule out a backlash that limits the MFA's flexibility.

VALLEE